New Nouveau Brunswick CANADA

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Human Rights Commission

Message / Human Rights Day (00/12/07)

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FREDERICTON (CNB) -- The following message was issued today by New Brunswick Human Rights Commission chair Dr. Patrick Malcolmson on the occasion of Human Rights Day, Dec. 7:

"On Dec. 10, New Brunswickers and citizens throughout the world are invited to celebrate International Human Rights Day. It is an opportunity to look back at our history, to re-examine the issues that face us today, to recognize the progress we have made and to renew our commitment to human rights in the future.

"Dec. 10 was chosen because it is the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted on Dec. 10, 1948. Human Rights Day has special significance for New Brunswickers since the principal author of the universal declaration was a native of New Brunswick, John Peters Humphrey. He headed the United Nations' Human Rights Division from 1946 to 1966 and researched and wrote the first draft of the universal declaration.

"As New Brunswickers, we can be proud of our record in relation to human rights. Our province was the second to create a human rights commission, for example, and the first to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on physical disability. In 1973, we were also a leader with respect to mandatory retirement.

"However, there have also been blemishes in our history. The first one is the continual displacement and assimilation of native peoples throughout our history. Another is the widespread discrimination that blacks were subjected to, even long after the abolition of slavery in 1833. When the Human Rights Commission was created in 1967, it was still common for blacks to be barred from nightclubs in Saint John and for Jewish people to be excluded from certain golf clubs. Throughout most of our history, women were barred from nearly all paid occupations. During the Second World War, they entered the workforce in great numbers, but were routinely paid lower wages than men for the same work until the early 1960s. They also faced a great deal of sexual harassment, for which little could be done until the 1980s. Anti-gay discrimination has been with us forever, and was not banned until 1992. Still today, high unemployment continues to be an intractable issue for disabled persons, as does the poverty and related problems of natives.

"This short history shows that human rights are dynamic. We can never say that discrimination has been eradicated and our work is done. There are stubborn issues that persist and new issues which come to the fore. History teaches us that it will continue to be necessary for the Human Rights Commission to play an important role in our future.

"Looking ahead on this Human Rights Day, I note that the year 2001 is the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, as well as the International Year of Mobilization against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

"The Year of Dialogue among Civilizations is an opportunity to emphasise that globalization is not be limited to economic and technological matters. The freer movement of ideas and goods allows us much greater exposure to other cultures, but it also profoundly affects our economies, traditions, cultures and politics. To deal with the stresses this engenders, we must renew our commitment to international understanding and to the recognition of the equal dignity of individuals and of societies and of the unique contributions that they make.

"We live in a diverse society. However, our differences should not blind us to our common humanity and the human rights principles that we share. The Year of Mobilization against Racism reminds us that racism, xenophobia and discrimination are harmful to our society. They tear at our social fabric and prevent us from fully achieving our economic potential and, in the worst cases, they jeopardise peace itself.

"On Dec. 10, the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission will present its annual Human Rights Award. This year, it will be presented to Hampton Elementary School for its production of Peace Cranes 2000, a musical based on John Humphrey's historical role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The main message of the play, and John Humphrey's dream, is 'human rights for everyone, not just a chosen few.'

On Human Rights Day, and throughout the year, I invite all New Brunswickers to join with us at the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission to help make John Humphrey's dream come true."

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MEDIA CONTACT: Dr. Patrick Malcolmson, chair, New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, 506-453-2301. For more information about the Human Rights Commission, see: http://www.gnb.ca/hrc-cdp/e/.

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